



## Cahuenga Elementary School

220 S. Hobart Blvd.

Los Angeles, CA 90004

Principal: Lloyd Houske

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Cahuenga is widely acclaimed for its success in educating its population of over 1,300 Korean and Latino students. The school's success has been recognized by the State of California as a distinguished school, by researchers studying successful bilingual programs (e.g., Gold, 2006), and by parents, who line up 3 to 4 days in advance to register their children for kindergarten.

- ◆ Elementary (K–5)
- ◆ 63% Hispanic
- ◆ 35% Asian
- ◆ 70% English Language Learners
- ◆ 81% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

Strong, stable leadership has enabled the school to establish a culture of accomplishment. Mr. Lloyd Houske, principal since the mid-1980s, sets a tone of high expectations and guides the staff in continual review and improvement. As noteworthy as the school's instructional program, is its commitment to professional development and continuous improvement.

“Success begins in kindergarten,” they say at Cahuenga. Literacy in English—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—is taught to all students starting in kindergarten. There are four program strands: English only; Spanish-English bilingual; Korean-English dual immersion; and Korean-English bilingual. One of the two state-approved reading series is used as the base program in each strand during the two-and-a-half hours of literacy instruction each day. Teachers are expected to follow textbook guidelines, and classroom observations reinforce this expectation; but they are also expected to go beyond—to modify or supplement the program to meet the needs of their students and to be able to explain the rationale for their actions.

Asked about what strategies contribute most to success, Houske points to the widespread use of graphic organizers. Several years ago, two teachers attended a workshop on graphic organizers and then provided turnkey training for the rest of the staff; they received flowers from the staff in appreciation. Now, graphic



organizers are a visual language used throughout the school K–5, in staff meetings where teachers learn the same way they teach their students, and with parents as well. “I just cannot tell you what focus graphic organizers give the teacher,” says Houske. The school serves as a demonstration site for the district as well.

A second graphic organizer program extends graphic organizers into an approach to scaffold writing. Beginning in kindergarten, students map out and write stories, and they learn to use rubrics to judge and improve their own writing.

Vocabulary lists have been developed for every unit, grade level, and track. Lists are sent home to parents so they can reinforce words. Teachers use language as much as possible to give exposure to words, they post words visually on word walls, and they use hand gestures when teaching words so each word is associated with a motion.

Teachers use data both to guide instruction of individual students and to evaluate and improve the program as a whole. District assessments are given every six weeks. Database software is used to manage the data and provide color-coded reports to teachers on the current skill levels of each student in the class. Staff spend one to two hours each week in collaborative teams reviewing data and looking for ways to improve what they are doing.

In recent years, the school has intensified its analysis of both the tests and the California standards that they measure. As an example, Houske was concerned because the kids did not do well in comprehension on a particular test. He brought all the grade-level teachers together to analyze what happened:

“ ‘Why do you think the scores were low, what are we not doing?’ And they said the children do not understand the questions. And I said, ‘Well, what are we going to do?’ And so they said we have got to change what we are doing in teaching. And so then what the grade level did was they planned a demo lesson and then one of the teachers volunteered to teach the lesson. And then we went up and we all observed the lesson and had a discussion over it. And one of the interesting insights that we gained in was it was not the words like *who*, *where* and *when* that the kids did not understand. But sometime it was another academic word within that question that threw the kids. And



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so, then, we had to talk about how can we help children be prepared for that...what we are doing as a continuation of that is taking a look at the release questions, and seeing what kind of questions do they ask regarding each standard, and making up sample questions for use as a sponge activity.”

While literacy is a focus, Cahuenga does not ignore other content areas. The scores in math are even higher than those in literacy. The school devotes time to social studies and science, during which it extends literacy and teaches academic English. And it has a thriving arts program, ranging from Korean drumming to dance to a school orchestra, partially supported through grants that the school has obtained.